

OPINION

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DPUC ruling 'benefits one provider: AT&T'

The Office of Consumer Counsel, a state agency empowered to advocate for consumers of public utility services, applauds the Register's editorial "TV from AT&T: more of the same."

While the office fully supports any fair competition that could be developed for cable television service, the unleashing of AT&T into the market without any regulation by the state Department of Public Utility Control only benefits one provider: AT&T.

As the Register points out, AT&T publicly has declared its intention to provide its cable service only to "high margin" customers, who presumably only live in certain towns and cities, while ignoring "low margin" customers. In its decision, the DPUC called our office's use of the term "redlining" for this behavior "inflammatory" and ruled that it is just "sound business practices," thus allowing such discrimination to proceed at AT&T's discretion.

Our office disagrees and has filed

suits in both federal court in New Haven and state Superior Court to put a stop to this situation. Not only is public policy violated by the DPUC's decision, state and federal law both demand that video provision by a local telephone company, no matter what technology is utilized, must be regulated in a manner equal to that imposed on the cable companies.

It is only fair that AT&T be held to the same standard of obligation while welcoming a fair competition between the phone companies and the cable companies. In that way, the Office of Consumer Counsel hopes consumers will receive the lower prices and enhanced technology that competition has the possibility of providing — to all Connecticut consumers.

William Vallée
New Britain

Editor's note: William Vallée is principal attorney in the state Office of Consumer Counsel.

